

LOVECRAFT STUDIES [9]



Lovecraft Studies 9

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H. P. Lovecraft: Consummate Prose Stylist

by Steven J. Mariconda



H. P. Lovecraft's prose style has been repeatedly condemned for its supposed verbosity and excessive use of adjectives. Yet these criticisms are inappropriate in light of the intent of Lovecraft's prose. His prose style was an extension of his theories on weird fiction. He believed that atmosphere was most important in weird fiction, and that prose style was vital in the creation of such atmosphere. Lovecraft carefully manipulated his prose to create atmosphere, styling it as the subject, tone, and narrative voice of a particular tale suggested. He could write concisely when he wished, but in some instances—especially in the early part of his career—felt that a more colorful approach better helped to achieve his aim of atmospheric tension. Some of Lovecraft's stories are overwritten, but the vast majority of his efforts, including many ornately styled tales, are not. Intelligence and purpose inform his writing, a unique medium which is as much poetry as it is prose. He was a consummate prose stylist who penned some of the finest prose in the history of weird fiction.

Lovecraft's prose has long been castigated by critics. The early, influential article by Edmund Wilson, "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous" (1945), called Lovecraft's style "verbose and undistinguished",¹ and objected to the author's use of adjectives. Many later critics have followed Wilson's lead. Peter Penzoldt characterized Lovecraft's prose as "artificial"² in *The Supernatural in Fiction* (1952). The 1950s and early 1960s saw many science fiction writers, such as Brian Aldiss and Avram Davidson, jeering at his distinctive style.³ Others have commented in the same vein over the past decade or so. British writer and philosopher Colin Wilson admitted that Lovecraft possessed "a gloomy imaginative power which compares with Poe" but found him to be "an atrocious writer".⁴ Closer afield, Lin Carter, author of some rather dubious Lovecraftian pastiches, has lambasted Lovecraft's style as "stilted, artificial, affected" and "very overwritten, verbose, and swimming in adjectives".⁵ Lovecraft's biographer

¹Rpt. in S. T. Joshi, ed., *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), p. 47. ²*Ibid.*, p. 64.

³Quoted in Jack L. Chalker, ed., *Mirage on Lovecraft* (Baltimore: Mirage Press, 1965), p. 25; and L. Sprague de Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1975), p. 439.

⁴"Prefatory Note" to *The Philosopher's Stone* (New York: Avon, 1974), p. 18.

⁵*Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), p. xiii.

L. Sprague de Camp called his prose "prolix".⁶ Perhaps the most recent negative remarks about Lovecraft's style are found in *A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction* and its companion, *A Reader's Guide to Fantasy*. In these volumes, Baird Searles and company warn that Lovecraft's "verbosity" may put some readers off, and describe his style as "purple to the point of ostentation".⁷

These critics employ criteria of questionable relevance. Atmosphere, not conciseness, was Lovecraft's primary goal. This goal coupled with the care with which he composed his fiction makes it evident that Lovecraft wrote as he did through intent rather than ineptitude.

Lovecraft often commented on the pivotal role of atmosphere in weird fiction. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* he wrote:

The true weird tale has . . . a certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread . . . atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is the creation of a given sensation . . . the more completely and unifiedly a story conveys this atmosphere, the better it is as a work of art in the given medium.⁸

On another occasion he spoke more specifically about the importance of atmosphere in his own work:

I, for instance, have an absolute minimum of plot in the formal, academic sense, and depend almost entirely upon atmosphere. But in the end, atmosphere repays cultivation; because it is the final criterion of convincingness or unconvincingness in any tale whose major appeal is to the imagination. (SL II.90)

In his attempt to create atmosphere, Lovecraft's most powerful and flexible tool was prose style. He wrote in a style best suited to his desired effect. Lovecraft stressed the importance of carefully constructed prose to other writers of supernatural fiction:

No matter how prosaic the language of a weird tale may seem, it must always be carefully managed with a view to atmospheric effect. Effective weird-fictional language, through rhythm and associative word values, must always have a certain menacing *tensity*. . . . Nothing kills a horror tale so positively as a brisk, cheerful, casual, or otherwise colourless and incongruous style. (SL III.212)

He was more explicit about technique to another correspondent:

⁶De Camp, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

⁷Baird Searles et al., *A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction* (New York: Avon, 1979), p. 112; and *A Reader's Guide to Fantasy* (New York: Avon, 1982), p. 212.

⁸*Supernatural Horror in Literature*, in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* (1965), pp. 349-50.

To make a story effective in the highest degree, the inner rhythms of the prose structure must be carefully fitted to the incidents as they march along; while each word must be chosen with infinite care—a care which considers not only the dictionary meaning, but the subtle aura of associations which it has picked up through folk-usage and previous literary employment. In other words, prose must be created with just the same exactness, delicacy of ear, imaginative fertility, etc., as verse. (SL III.355)

The last sentence is especially significant. Lovecraft thought of himself primarily as a poet prior to the resumption of his fictional efforts in 1917. He was thoroughly familiar with the devices of sound and rhythm which poetry employs, in Pope's words, to make "the sound . . . seem an Echo of the sense".⁹ He used his experience with these devices to great effect in his prose. In fact, it might be said that Lovecraft never wholly left poetry because of the abundance of poetic devices in even his most realistically styled prose.

Lovecraft's regard for the power of prose was reflected in his meticulous compositional habits. He called the revision phase of writing "a tedious, painstaking process".¹⁰ One should never, he wrote,

consider a rapidly written sentence as a finished product. It may be that four or five verbal transportations will be needed to produce the desired effect; or that wholesale substitutions of words of diverse length—often demanding still further textual changes for their perfect accommodation—will have to be effected. . . . An artistically conceived prose manuscript must be in a perpetual state of flux; with unlimited opportunities for every kind of shifting, interpolation, and minute remodelling, and with no sentence or paragraph accepted more than tentatively until the very last word is set down. (SL III.132)

We can see that the particulars of Lovecraft's prose were carefully considered. He attempted to create atmosphere in different ways and made a distinction between "atmospheric impressionism" and "straightforward narrative prose".¹¹ Lovecraft approached each tale according to its subject matter. Part of the approach was the choice of narrative voice; another, the tone of the story—be it, say, "intense, clutching, delirious horror; delicate dream-like fantasy; realistic, scientific horror;" or "very subtle adumbration".¹²

Take for example "The Hound" (1922), a tale about a man stalked by a thing from a grave he defiled. The narrator states that he is well versed in the symbolists, the pre-Raphaelites, Huysmans, and Baudelaire. The great

⁹Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, part ii, line 165.

¹⁰SL V.203.

¹¹SL II.61.

¹²*Notes & Commonplace Book* (Lakeport, Ca.: Futile Press, 1938; rpt. West Warwick, R.I.: Necronomicon Press, 1978), p. 14.

deal of pleasure he takes from grave-robbing and the cellarful of morbid objects he and his companion have assembled suggest that he is a psychotic. He is about to commit suicide as a result of the thing's pursuit. Given these circumstances, the feverish and ornate prose of the tale is fittingly styled. It is well written and certainly succeeds in creating atmosphere.

Contrast this with "The Temple" (1920), which only vaguely suggests its horror. Purported to be written by a German naval officer, the style of the tale is accordingly concise and restrained. It is very effective in creating atmosphere and masterfully conveys the growing mental unbalance of the narrator.

This prose was written two years before the 'florid' "The Hound", which shows that Lovecraft manipulated the ornateness of his style as the subject matter, narrative voice, and tone of each tale suggested. Each prose performance must thus be judged not only at face value but in relationship to the tale as a whole. Under this exegesis, the terms "long-winded" and "florid" are inherently meaningless. Rather, the question is whether the type of prose Lovecraft employed is well suited to the tale's particulars, whether it is well-written prose of its type, and most importantly whether the prose succeeds in creating atmosphere. Some of Lovecraft's tales—like "The Lurking Fear"—are overwritten even in context; others—like "Polaris"—are simply poorly written. However, more than three-quarters of Lovecraft's fictional output stands as a formidable array of effective and consummately styled prose. Highlights are simply too numerous to mention. The insidious "The Rats in the Walls", the evocative "The Colour out of Space", the dignified and eruditely horrific *Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, and the unimpeachably frigid *At the Mountains of Madness* form only a fraction of the vast body of Lovecraft's stunning prose achievements.

As Lovecraft grew experienced in writing weird fiction, he became convinced that "a solidly realistic framework is needed to build up preparation for the unreal element . . . this idea became a conscious one about the 'Cthulhu' period."¹³ The prose which he used to put "The Call of Cthulhu" and most of its successors across is correspondingly subdued and in no way "purple". When Lovecraft wrote realistically styled prose, he still used careful construction and an extraordinary amount of poetic devices to create atmosphere, as we can see by examining one of his last tales, "The Haunter of the Dark" (1935). This is one of several of his works which is available as a recording, and hearing it read aloud makes it easier to detect some of the techniques he employed.

In this story, Lovecraft attempted to capture the feelings of strangeness incited in him by a distant view and an old, deserted edifice.¹⁴ He chose a third-person narrator to relate "dispassionately"¹⁵ the story of the last days of the weird artist Robert Blake. This is a departure from Lovecraft's usual first-person narration, which enabled him to build atmosphere with subjective as well as objective description and employ his prose

¹³SL III.192-93.

¹⁴SL V.224.

¹⁵"The Haunter of the Dark", in *The Dunwich Horror and Others* (1963), p. 99. Further references to this story appear in the text, with the denotation "HD".

to reflect the rising alarm of the narrator.¹⁶ In writing this tale he evidently felt that atmosphere could be more effectively sustained by modulating the tone and tension. Lovecraft accomplished this by switching back and forth from the narrator's "objective" commentary to the latter's paraphrases of Blake's diary and Providence newspaper accounts of the events.

There are even passages of the narrative which are related at third hand, such as the paragraph of dialogue of an Irish policeman whom Blake speaks with in the church square (HD 103) and the history of the Shining Trapezohedron from the cryptographic church record, both evidently transcribed by Blake into his diary:

Of the Shining Trapezoh-dron he speaks often, calling it a window on all time and space, and tracing its history from the days it was fashioned on dark Yuggoth, before ever the Old Ones brought it to earth. It was treasured and placed in its curious box by the crinoid beings of Antarctica, salvaged from their ruins by the serpent-men of Valusia, and peered at aeons later in Lemuria by the first human beings. It crossed strange lands and stranger seas, and sank with Atlantis before a Minoan fisher meshed it in his net and sold it to swarthy merchants from nighted Khem. The Pharaoh Nephren-Ka built around it a temple with a windowless crypt, and did that which caused his name to be stricken from all monuments and records. Then it slept in the ruins of that evil fane which the priests and the new Pharaoh destroyed, till the delver's spade once more brought it forth to curse mankind. (HD 111-12)

Lovecraft had greater opportunity for more obviously poetic atmosphere-building as he moved further away from the first-hand relation of events.

The paragraph quoted illustrates another device Lovecraft often used, a passage filled with outré and exotic places, names, or books. The recitation of such words has a rather incantatory and hypnotic effect. These proper nouns are frequently preceded by epithets—"dark Yuggoth", "the abhorred Necronomicon"—which surround them with a subtle aura of dread. Related to Lovecraft's use of epithets is his coining of compound descriptors such as "sky-reaching" monoliths or "bird-shunned" shadows.¹⁷ Aside from lending a sense of urgency, these terms sometimes imply that the nature of what is being described evokes unprecedented nomenclature.

Similarly, Lovecraft combined several words into more potently atmospheric phrases. In this and in longer passages as well, he used two of the most important techniques available to him: alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds) and assonance (repetition of vowel sounds). He could be extremely deft with these devices, and used them frequently. The narrator tells us that Blake

¹⁶Cf. S. T. Joshi, *Reader's Guide to H. P. Lovecraft* (Mercer Island, Wa.: Starmont House, 1982), p. 62.

¹⁷Cf. S. T. Joshi, letter to the editor, *Crypt of Cthulhu*, 1, No. 5 (Roodmas 1982), 42.

painted seven canvases; studies of nameless, unhuman monsters, and profoundly alien, non-terrestrial landscapes. (HD 100)

The repetition of the "s" and the sonorant "m", "n", "l", and "r" combines with the tense vowel sounds "ä" and "ë" to give this sentence an atmospherically affecting quality. Lovecraft sometimes used alliteration and assonance in onomatopoeia, where the sound of the words is strongly suggestive of the object or action being described:

At the sharp click of that closing, a soft stirring sound seemed to come from the steeple's eternal blackness overhead, beyond the trap-door. (HD 110)

In this effective sentence we hear the awakening of the Haunter of the Dark. Lovecraft also employed sentence structure and syntax onomatopoeically:

And yet that stirring in the steeple frightened him horribly, so that he plunged almost wildly down the spiral stairs, across the ghoulish nave, into the vaulted basement, out amidst the gathering dusk of the deserted square, and down through the teeming, fear-haunted alleys and avenues of Federal Hill toward the sane central streets and the home-like brick sidewalks of the college district. (HD 110-11)

This sentence conveys a feeling of frantic motion through its parallel structure, the repetition of phrases which duplicate each other in their main grammatical features. Parallel structure was often used by Lovecraft to gain atmospheric effect:

They were the black, forbidden things which most sane people have never even heard of, or have heard of only in furtive, timorous whispers; the banned and dreaded repositories of equivocal secrets and immemorial formulae which have trickled down the stream of time from the days of man's youth, and the dim, fabulous days before man was. (HD 106)

One of Lovecraft's favorite types of parallel structure was anaphora, in which the parallel phrases all begin with the same words:

He felt entangled with something—something which was not in the stone, but which had looked through it at him—something which would ceaselessly follow him with a cognition that was not physical sight. (HD 110)

The climactic order of the information in the structures adds to the effect. Between the first and second phrases we see another atmospheric device, chiasmus (or symmetry), an inverted relationship between the syntactical elements of parallel phrases.

Parallel structure can also be used to delay the completion of gram-

matical structure (closure) of the sentence. Until closure is reached, the reader experiences an expectation of it as grammatical tension. Grammatical tension varies with the types of structure used, the number of structures kept open, and the degree of interrupting material included.¹⁸ Low-tension syntax resolves all structures quickly, and Lovecraft used it for "objective" or terse statements. Movement between high- and low-tension syntax serves to build atmosphere in this passage:

It was then that his nerves broke down. Thereafter, lounging exhaustedly about in a dressing-gown, he did little but stare from his west window, shiver at the threat of thunder, and make wild entries in his diary.

The great storm broke just before midnight on August 8th. Lightning struck repeatedly in all parts of the city, and two remarkable fireballs were reported. The rain was torrential, while a constant fusillade of thunder brought sleeplessness to thousands. Blake was utterly frantic in his fear for the lighting system, and tried to telephone the company around 1 a.m., though by that time service had been temporarily cut off in the interest of safety. He recorded everything in his diary—the large, nervous, often undecipherable hieroglyphs telling their own story of growing frenzy and despair, and of entries scrawled blindly in the dark. (HD 116)

The tensest possible syntax is called periodic, because grammatical closure is delayed to the final segment of the sentence.¹⁹ Lovecraft powerfully employs this syntax near the end of his tale:

Excessive imagination and neurotic unbalance on Blake's part, aggravated by knowledge of the evil bygone cult whose startling traces he had uncovered, form the dominant interpretation given those final frenzied jottings. (HD 120)

The passive voice and placement of the noun and verb at the end add substantially to the tension of the sentence.

Another method Lovecraft used to create a mood was rhythm. As we know from poetry, the cadence of words and phrases has a profound effect on the reader's state of mind. Lovecraft created atmospheric rhythms with both sentence structure and word choice. He attempted to relate each incident with appropriate accentuation, as in the passage in which Blake gazes into the Shining Trapezohedron:

Before he realised it, he was looking at the stone again, and let-
 / x x / x x / x x / x x
 ting its curious influence call up a nebulous pageantry in his mind.
 / x / x / x
 He saw processions of robed, hooded figures whose outlines were not

¹⁸Richard M. Eastman, *Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 165-66.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 166.

/ x / x / x
 human, and looked on endless leagues of desert lined with carved,
 / x x / x x / x / x
 sky-reaching monoliths. He saw towers and walls in nighted depths
 / x x
 under the sea, and vortices of space where wisps of black mist floated
 / x x / x
 before thin shimmerings of cold purple haze. And beyond all else he
 / x x / x / x / x
 glimpsed an infinite gulf of darkness, where solid and semi-solid forms
 / x / x / x / x
 were known only by their windy stirrings, and cloudy patterns of force
 / x / x
 seemed to superimpose order on chaos and hold forth a key to all the
 paradoxes and arcana of the worlds we know.
 x / x / x / x / x
 Then all at once the spell was broken by an access of gnawing, in-
 determinate panic fear. (HD 110)

Lovecraft weaves a dream-mood with the paired dactyls (/ x x) and a "pro-
 cession" of trochees (/ x). These rhythms and the lengthening clauses of
 the sentences create an ever-deepening feeling of somnolence. He cuts this
 mood off sharply at the beginning of the following paragraph with four iambs
 (x /).

The tale closes with the final diary entry of Robert Blake, recording
 his impressions during the last ten minutes of his life. Lovecraft had
 previously employed the verbatim transcription of the chaotic thoughts of
 a character (usually the narrator), perhaps to greatest effect at the cli-
 max of "The Rats in the Walls" (1923).²⁰ This sophisticated technique is
 interestingly reminiscent of the modernist literature never favored by
 Lovecraft. The methods of the "'stream-of-consciousness' school of lit-
 erature," he felt,

do indeed transcend the limits of real art; though I believe they are
 destined to exert a strong influence upon art itself. . . . Just how
 much of the subconscious hodge-podge behind any outward event ought
 to be recorded by a literary artist is still a very perplexing ques-
 tion. It must be decided independently in each particular case by
 the author's own judgment and aesthetic sense—and I for one believe
 it can be done in such a manner as to leave the main current of
 Western-European literary tradition undisturbed in its aesthetic
 essentials. (SL II.248-49)

²⁰Cf. the two riotous parodies on this technique in "The Loved Dead"
 (1923), in *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions* (1970), pp. 70, 74.

Here, the author gives us a disturbing glimpse into the mind of Robert Blake as the character attempts to resist psychic possession by the thing in the steeple. Blake wavers between full sentences and dissociated fragments of thought, the punctuation becoming ever more abrupt, until the final, horrific sentence:

I see it—coming here—hell-wind—titan blur—black wings—Yog-Sothoth save me—the three-lobed burning eye. . . . (HD 120)

It is not to be thought that the essentially intangible effectiveness of Lovecraft's prose lies wholly in the author's application of a series of devices of language. Lovecraft held that this alone could never constitute artistic prose. He wrote to Clark Ashton Smith:

As for the unconscious element in composition . . . I agree with you that it is really very considerable. In fact, I think it can be fairly said that no first-rate story can ever be written without the author's actually experiencing the moods and visions concerned in a sort of oneiroscopic way. Unless there is actual emotion and pseudo-memory behind a tale, something will inevitably be lacking, no matter how deft, expert, and mature the craftsmanship may be. Emotion makes itself felt in the unconscious choice of words, management of rhythms, and disposal of stresses in the flow of narration, whilst an image or idea of natural or spontaneous occurrence is a thousand-fold more vivid than any which can be arbitrarily invented or consciously adopted from external sources. (SL III.212-13)²¹

In this lies the true power of Lovecraft's prose, for few authors have felt their work as sincerely and acutely as he.

The bulk of Lovecraft's prose is well written and atmospherically effective. He wrote as he did for carefully considered reasons. Though obviously capable of writing them, simple sentences with few adjectives were often incompatible with Lovecraft's desired effect and the particulars of his tales. Impeccably executed, his style is not intrinsically worse than any other. Lovecraft plumbed the depths of fear, dream, time, and space as few others have done, and it is doubtful if any other prose could have better conveyed the intense philosophical and psychological conceptions which were his concerns. With his prose style Lovecraft achieved that which he had set out to do—to excite in the reader "a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim."²²

²¹Cf. also SL II.112 and SL IV.264.

²²"Supernatural Horror in Literature", in *Dagon*, p. 350.

On the Natures of Nug and Yeb

by Will Murray



In the various stories written to order for his revision clients, H. P. Lovecraft created a number of additions to the pantheon of entities in which Yog-Sothoth, Azathoth and Cthulhu predominated. These secondary entities included Rhan-Tegoth in "The Horror in the Museum" and Ghatanothoa in "Out of the Eons" (both written with Hazel Heald) and Yig, in "The Curse of Yig" (written with Zealia Bishop). For the most part, these creations are rather well developed with distinct physical properties, but their appearances are limited to Lovecraft's revision work. There are exceptions. The snake-god, Yig, is mentioned in numerous revisions and then filters into the main body of the Cthulhu Mythos. Shub-Niggurath, first mentioned in "The Last Test" (written with Adolphe de Castro), is mentioned in virtually every Mythos story to follow, but only in passing—never as a physical presence. Otherwise, Lovecraft did not incorporate most of the entities he doubtless created for his clients into his work proper, and they were promptly forgotten. This is a curious fact inasmuch as he willingly absorbed such creations as Clark Ashton Smith's Tsathoggua into the Mythos.

It is not unusual, then, that two of these secondary entities, Nug and Yeb, are relegated to three very brief mentions of various Lovecraft revisions, all of them written between 1927 and 1933. In all these instances, the references in question are so bare of information that scant information of the natures of Nug and Yeb is presented. This is in contrast to the fuller characterizations of Yig and the others. Indeed, to read only "The Last Test", "The Mound" and "Out of the Eons", one would believe Nug and Yeb to be extremely minor creations.

Yet, long after the likes of Rhan-Tegoth and Ghatanothoa are forgotten, even by Lovecraft, the names of Nug and Yeb recur again and again in Lovecraft's letters in such a manner as to suggest strongly that they are an important part of the Mythos, and very close to the surface of Lovecraft's imaginative mind.

Nug and Yeb are first mentioned, along with Shub-Niggurath, in Lovecraft's revision of Adolphe de Castro's "The Last Test". The reference has no apparent bearing on the story proper. A Dr. Alfred Clarendon, who is a typical Lovecraftian dabbler in forbidden things, is quoted as telling the narrator: "We've both meddled in dangerous things, but you needn't think you know all my resources. How about the Nemesis of Flame? I talked in Yemen with an old man who had come back alive from the Crimson Desert—he had seen Irem, the City of Pillars, and had worshipped at the underground shrines of Nug and Yeb—Iä! Shub-Niggurath!"¹

¹*The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions* (1970), pp. 219-20.

This is an oblique mention at best. It is not clear whether or not the "Nemesis of Flame" has any connection with Nug and Yeb. The Nemesis of Flame is a strange Tibetan named Surama, who with Dr. Clarendon is spreading the deadly black fever from beyond the earth until an unearthly fire destroys them both. Lovecraft probably picked up the "Nemesis of Flame" from Algernon Blackwood's "The Nemesis of Fire" (in *John Silence—Physician Extraordinary*)—interestingly enough, it is a John Silence story about the depredations of an Egyptian fire elemental. Nothing more is said about Nug and Yeb in "The Last Test".

In "The Mound", Panfilo de Zamacona is escorted through the subterranean world of K'n-yan, where he sees "the temples of Yig, Tulu, Nug, Yeb, and the Not-to-be-Named-One which lined the road at infrequent intervals", and mention is made that "the ceremonies of Nug and Yeb sickened him especially—so much, indeed, that he refrained from describing them in his manuscript."² As in "The Last Test", the reference to Nug and Yeb is immediately followed by one to Shub-Niggurath, there called "the All-Mother and wife of the Not-to-be-Named-One".³

This is also the case in "Out of the Eons". Here mention is made of T'yog, the High Priest of Shub-Niggurath, who "believed that Shub-Niggurath, Nug, and Yeb, as well as Yig the Serpent-god, were ready to take sides with man against the tyranny and presumption of Ghatanothoa."⁴ A second mention telescopes the above-named as "Shub-Niggurath and her sons".⁵

Thus, from Lovecraft's fiction, we are able to glean these simple facts: Nug and Yeb are the sons of Shub-Niggurath, and that they are worshipped in shrines of apparent equal importance with Yig and Tulu (Cthulhu). "Out of the Eons" makes mention of the fact that in the days of Atlantis, T'yog counted Shub-Niggurath and her sons among the "gods friendly to man" who "could be arrayed against the hostile gods".⁶ This may or may not be a delusion on his part.

There is nothing unusual about these references to Nug and Yeb, either in their brevity or absence of description, in and of themselves. Lovecraft, after all, frequently mentions Shub-Niggurath in many, many stories with no other elaboration than the shouted phrase, "The Goat with a Thousand Young!" which is sometimes given as "The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young!" Her feminine attributes are seldom mentioned. But after publication of these three revisions, further references to Nug and Yeb begin to appear in Lovecraft's correspondence. At first these are only casual mentions in passing.

In a letter to Robert E. Howard dated 14 August 1930, Lovecraft states: "Regarding the solemnly cited myth-cycle of Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, R'lyeh, Nyarlathotep, Nug, Yeb, Shub-Niggurath, etc., etc.—let me confess that this is all a synthetic concoction of my own. . . ."⁷ Directly following, he mentions Azathoth, Abdul Alhazred, the *Necronomicon*, his revisions and even Smith's Tsathoggua—in short, just about all the major Mythos entities. It is somewhat surprising to find Nug and Yeb so comfortably en-

²*Ibid.*, p. 353.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷SL III.166.

sconced between Nyarlathotep and Shub-Niggurath—especially as not even Yig, the most oft-used and best-delineated of the revision entities, is given a nod. This letter was written only a few months after composition of "The Mound", but three years before "Out of the Eons". At that time only "The Last Test" had seen print in *Weird Tales*, and that was in 1928.

The next reference was only a few months later, in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith dated only January 1931. The body of the letter contains nothing relevant; rather, it is Lovecraft's heading and closing which are of interest. The heading reads, as reproduced in *Selected Letters III*, as follows:

Shrine of Nng, in The Temple of Infra-
Red Vapour on The Doomed Nebula
Zlykariob, in the Hour of the Tor-
turing of The Worm Bgnghaa-Ythu-
Yaddith⁸

The closing is given as:

Yours for the formula that is not in Olan's Latin Text
—Ec'h-Pi-El
Guardian of the Black Flame of Nng & Yeb.⁹

Clearly, someone who transcribed that letter misread Lovecraft's handwriting and the reading should be "Nug and Yeb". It is also safe to assume that the reading with which the heading should begin is "Shrine of Nug". It is fortunate in this case that the two references are in the same letter and that Nug and Yeb are almost always mentioned in the same breath.

Now, admittedly, Lovecraft rather playfully headed or closed off his letters during this period with joking allusions to his work and the work of others, as in:

Many-columned Arcades of Weed-grown Y'ha-nthlei
in the Hour of the Unseen Howling¹⁰

or:

Pinnacle of Unknown Kadath
Hour of the Red Aurora¹¹

but invariably these references accurately reflect the internal integrity of Lovecraft's fiction when they include specific references. But where Nug and Yeb are concerned, these references do more than reflect; they amplify.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁹*Ibid.* ["Olan's" should surely be "Olaus's" (Wormius).—S.T.J.]

¹⁰SL IV.10.

¹¹SL IV.341.

In another letter to Smith, dated 8 February 1931, Lovecraft closes:

Yrs for the nether hells of Nyarlathotep
Ec'h-Pi-El
Guardian of the Black Fire of Nng & Yeb.¹²

Another misreading, and now it is "Black Fire" and not "Black Flame" of Nug and Yeb. A year later, Lovecraft closes off another letter to Smith, dated 20 January 1932, with:

Yours in the adoration of the Black Flame—
Ec'h-Pi-El¹³

So far, each of these references is rather minor. However, the one in a letter written to James F. Morton and dated 27 April 1933 is not. In this letter, Lovecraft includes a genealogy of the entities of the Mythos. It is whimsically conceived and carried out—the point is to show Lovecraft's own descent from the Old Ones—but it is significant for a number of more useful reasons.

At the apex of Lovecraft's chart is Azathoth, from whom all the entities listed have descended. From Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, The Nameless Mist and Darkness arose, creating a second generation. The Nameless Mist birthed Yog-Sothoth and Darkness birthed Shub-Niggurath. Yog-Sothoth and Shub-Niggurath then mated (the only sexual union on the chart) to produce Nug and Yeb, who comprise the fourth generation. Cthulhu is immediately descended from Nug, and Tsathoggua is the offspring of Neb. Lovecraft notes that Cthulhu and Tsathoggua are "first of their respective lines to inhabit this planet".¹⁴ From Cthulhu and Tsathoggua sprang Shaurash-Ho and Yabou, respectively, from whom other entities not mentioned in the Mythos are descended, including mythical ancestors of Clark Ashton Smith and Lovecraft himself.

Several things are striking about this genealogy, not the least of which is Nug and Yeb's superior placement on the chart with respect to the more famous Cthulhu and Tsathoggua. Then there is the curious absence of Yig, who, as one of Shub-Niggurath's sons, belongs to the fourth generation with Nug and Yeb. But most interesting are the correlations between Lovecraft's chart and the genealogy of the Greek gods, who grew out of Chaos, just as the entities of the Mythos grew out of Azathoth, whom Lovecraft describes as "Ultimate Chaos".

According to Greek mythology, four forces sprang from Chaos—Mother Earth (Gaea), Desire (Eros), Darkness (Erebus) and Night (Nyx).¹⁵ Both genealogies contain a force known as Darkness. In the Greek chart, the next generation consists of Air and Day, who are the result of the mating of Darkness and Night, whereupon a number of other forces come into being, all of whom are created asexually, as in Lovecraft's Theogony, until Earth

¹²SL III.286.

¹³SL IV.11.

¹⁴SL IV.183.

¹⁵Meyer Reinhold, *Past and Present: The Continuity of Classical Myths*, pp. 59-61.

and Heaven mate and produce the first generation of actual gods.

Generally, the two genealogies are similar, with Cthulhu and Tsathogua, as the first of their lines to inhabit the earth, representing the first actual gods. That might mean that Nug and Yeb more or less correspond to either Air and Day, in their unique sexual creation, or to Earth and Heaven. This last supposition draws some strength from the similar genealogy of the Egyptian gods. In that chart, Atum equates to Chaos or Azathoth, from whom the male and female principles of air (Shu and Tefnut) sprang. Shu and Tefnut then produce Earth and Sky, known as Geb and Nut, from whom the main gods, such as Isis, Osiris and others, are generated.¹⁶ It is probably no coincidence that Nut and Geb, by virtue of changing one letter in each name, become Nug and Yeb. Many of the other Mythos entities bear distinctly Egyptian names.

Are Nug and Yeb derived from Egyptian mythology? In a letter to Duane Rimel dated 14 February 1934 Lovecraft would seem to refute such a suggestion. Referring to the coining of names of his creations, he says: "To a large degree they are designed to suggest—either closely or remotely—certain names in actual history or folklore which have weird or sinister associations connected with them. Thus 'Yuggoth' has a sort of Arabic or Hebraic cast, to suggest certain words passed down from antiquity in the magical formulae contained in Moorish or Jewish manuscripts. Other synthetic names like 'Nug' and 'Yeb' suggest the dark and mysterious tone of Tartar or Thibetan folklore."¹⁷

Again, it is noteworthy that Lovecraft cites these two little-used entities, but that fact aside, this statement does not entirely discount an Egyptian source for Nug and Yeb. For one, the effect of those names, and not their building-blocks, may be what Lovecraft is characterizing as "Thibetan". The similarities between Nut and Geb and Nug and Yeb are too strong to be easily ignored.

There are further references to Nug and Yeb in Lovecraft's letters. A letter to Robert Barlow, which is dated Second week of February, 1935, is headed:

Kadath in the Cold Waste—Epiphany
of Nug.¹⁸

Another letter, this one to J. Vernon Shea and dated 13 March 1935, closes:

Yrs. for the Black Litany of Nug & Yeb—
Ec'h-Pi-El¹⁹

Two other scattered references are similar enough to warrant mention. In a letter to Clark Ashton Smith dated 3 December 1929, Lovecraft expresses his appreciation of Smith's "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros" by exclaim-

¹⁶"Mythology in Ancient Egypt", by Rudolph Anthes, in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. Samuel Noah Kramer, p. 37.

¹⁷SL IV.386.

¹⁸SL V.93.

¹⁹SL V.123.

ing, "Yug! n'gha k'yun bth'gth R'lyeh gllur ph'ngui Cthulhu yzkaa . . . what an atmosphere!"²⁰ Probably Lovecraft is referring to the prophet, Yug, from Lord Dunsany's *The Gods of Pegāna*.²¹ In another letter to Smith, bearing a date of 13 November 1933, the heading bears another possible misreading:

Pit of Yub.
Hour of the Squirmers' Emergence
from the Walls.²²

Note that the word "Squirmers" is pluralized, and that the closing is given as:

Yrs. for the Litany of the Under Pits
—Ec'h-Pi-El²³

It is tenuous at best to link the Squirmers with Nug and Yeb, or their Black Litany with the similar mention above, but the possibility deserves mention. All this, of course, presupposes that Lovecraft kept in mind specific ideas having to do with Nug and Yeb, even though he had ceased using them in his fiction. As improbable as that might seem, the final, and very substantial, mention of these two entities in Lovecraft's published correspondence lends further credence to this assertion.

This letter was written six months before Lovecraft's own death, and a full three years after Nug and Yeb had last appeared in "Out of the Eons". The letter is to Willis Conover and dated 1 September 1936. Tongue-in-cheek, Lovecraft lets Conover in on some hitherto undisclosed information concerning some of the members of the Cthulhu pantheon: "Yog-Sothoth's wife is the hellish cloud-like entity Shub-Niggurath, in whose honour nameless cults hold the rite of the Goad with a Thousand Young. By her he has two monstrous offspring—the evil twins Nug and Yeb."²⁴ Later on in the letter, he adds: "As for little Nug and Yeb (only ten feet in diameter when in their average form), they are a bit destructive sometimes, though it's only a playful, good-natured roughness. I like to have the little fellows about (even though they sometimes do dissolve visitors and passersby, and cause occasional troublesome enquiries), for they are basically very friendly and companionable. I imagine they must be somewhat like Howard the ghoul—in temperament, though not in appearance."²⁵

Not only does the above add new information on the physical natures of Shub-Niggurath, Nug and Yeb, but, more importantly, it neatly dovetails with all previous mentions of those entities in fiction and correspondence with no apparent contradictions. The conceit that Yog-Sothoth and Shub-

²⁰SL III.87.

²¹It is worth noting that if you transpose the first letters in Nug and Yeb, the result is Yug and Neb. In "The Outsider" Lovecraft mentions "the rock tombs of Neb".

²²SL IV.317.

²⁴Willis Conover, *Lovecraft at Last*, p. 93.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

Niggurath mated to produce Nug and Yeb is carried through unaltered from the genealogy written over three years previous. There is one ambiguity, however. In all previous mentions of Shub-Niggurath—including many in his letters—Lovecraft almost invariably adds "The Goat with a Thousand Young!" (or one of the variations thereof) to that name, as if Shub-Niggurath is the Goat with a Thousand Young. In one letter to Clark Ashton Smith, dated 26 March 1931, he says: "Not yet, despite the outward evidence of silence, hath the aeon-aged blasphemer Ech-Pi-El fallen utterly a victim to Yog-Sothoth & the Goat With a Thousand Young!"²⁶ By that phrase, Lovecraft would appear to be referring to Shub-Niggurath, who is never physically described in any Lovecraft fiction. If she is a "hellish cloud-like entity", how can she also be the "Goat with a Thousand Young"? It may be that the goat image is emblematic of Shub-Niggurath's properties as a fertility goddess ("the All-Mother", as Lovecraft calls her in "The Mound") and not to be taken literally. The mention in the letter to Conover about the "rite of the Goat with a Thousand Young" held in Shub-Niggurath's honor appears to support this interpretation.

What, then, do we learn about Nug and Yeb that is new? That they are twins, and therefore probably identical, and not merely siblings. Of them, we also learn that they are "evil" (which is probably more perception than accurate assessment—Lovecraft's entities are beyond good and evil except as we perceive them) and that they average ten feet in diameter. Diameter implies that they are round or oval. Being the offspring of Yog-Sothoth, who is described in "The Horror in the Museum" as "a congeries of iridescent globes",²⁷ this makes sense. Possibly Nug and Yeb are somewhat amorphous, as well. They might even be shape-shifters, but the implication is that they are identical round entities.²⁸

This is a fairly full picture of Nug and Yeb. Curiously full, considering their neglect in the main body of Lovecraft's fiction. Only in "The Shadow out of Time" is there a reference which could be linked with them, and that is the mention of "Nug-Soth, a magician of the dark conquerors of 16,000 A.D."²⁹ Nug-Soth could have taken part of his name from Nug, whom he may worship. But this is conjecture.

There is also an interesting correlation between Nug and Yeb and one of the descriptions of shoggoths in *At the Mountains of Madness*; it runs: "They were normally shapeless entities composed of a viscous jelly which looked like an agglutination of bubbles, and each averaged about fifteen

²⁶SL III.356.

²⁷The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions, p. 119.

²⁸This stretches credulity, but in Lovecraft's 1923 story, "The Rats in the Walls", there is a reference to "those grinning caverns of earth's centre where Nyarlathotep, the mad faceless god, howls blindly in the darkness to the piping of two amorphous idiot flute-players" (*The Dunwich Horror and Others*, p. 51). All later references to these flute-players in other stories do not specify their number. Could they be Nug and Yeb?

²⁹The Dunwich Horror and Others, p. 395.

feet in diameter when a sphere."³⁰ This description dovetails with the "congeries of iridescent globes" of Yog-Sothoth. From this we might extrapolate that Yog-Sothoth, the shoggoths, and Nug and Yeb are composed of much the same matter. It is possible that Nug and Yeb possess that bubble-like appearance. It would be stretching things too much to postulate a relationship between the shoggoths and those others, but the suggestion of a connection is there.

It would also be conjecture to attempt to explain so many definite mentions of Nug and Yeb in Lovecraft's letters over an extended period of time. Between 1930 and 1936, there is at least one mention of either of those entities in a letter for every year except 1932 (in which only the Black Flame is mentioned). I am not certain that even Cthulhu is accorded so much consideration. It is almost as if Nug and Yeb had figured in a Lovecraft story in such a way that they assumed great importance in Lovecraft's own mind. This is possible, but not necessarily the case. Shub-Niggurath was never prominent in the Mythos, although her name is invoked in the majority of stories. It could be, however, that there were more references to Nug and Yeb than in the three revisions and miscellaneous which have come down to us. Possibly in a discarded draft of a story, an unknown fragment or even an unpublished revision. For that matter, it is likely that there are other references to Nug and Yeb in letters not printed in the various *Selected Letters*—half the information on them quoted in the letter to Conover was excised from *Selected Letters V*.³¹

A more likely explanation for Lovecraft's handling of the offspring of Shub-Niggurath is that he had developed them rather clearly in his mind, as he seems to have their mother and other of his creations, in expectation of using them in a future story—which, unfortunately, he never got around to writing. If this is the case—as it surely seems to be—then Lovecraft, at some point, thought out his pantheon of entities in a much more complete and thorough manner than is reflected in any of his published writings. This is something to ponder.

Despite the fuller picture of Nug and Yeb which can be gained from the letters of H. P. Lovecraft, there are many unanswered questions remaining. We do not know their properties, for example. Are they, like Nut and Geb, supposed to represent the earth and the sky? Are they male and female? What is the Black Fire? Is there a connection between it and the Nemesis of Fire mentioned in "The Last Test"? And why were Nug and Yeb worshipped in underground shrines on this planet when they never set foot on it? We will probably never have the answers to these questions. But we do possess enough facts about Nug and Yeb to ensure that they will remain the least known but most tantalizing of all Lovecraft's many creations.

³⁰At the *Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*, pp. 62-63.

³¹The full text can be found in *Lovecraft at Last*, pp. 92-93.

Yin and Yang and Franz and Howard

by John Stryzik



In the second anniversary issue of *The Twilight Zone*, one can read the following tidbit of pontification by Colin Wilson, extracted from *The Strength to Dream*: "But although Lovecraft is such a bad writer, he has something of the same kind of importance as Kafka. Only Kafka's approach was as naive as Lovecraft's. He also relied simply on presenting a picture of the world's mystery and the uncertainty of the life of man."¹ Since the year 1983 marked the centennial of Kafka's birth, I thought a brief examination of his work set against Lovecraft's might not be too inappropriate. After all, Wilson is not the only writer to team Kafka and Lovecraft. J. Vernon Shea points out that the work of the two authors strikes eerily common chords when he writes: "... yet he [Kafka] employed themes very similar to Lovecraft's: the hideous transformation and the sense of alienation of the protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*; the feeling of helpless buffeting and the incomprehensibility of the horror of a malign universe displayed in *The Trial* and *The Castle*; the cruelty which was just routine for the Inquisitor in *The Penal Colony*; the bewilderment of a 'promised land' turned sour in *Amerika*."²

Lovecraft and Kafka share the same existential vision, but use wildly opposing reference points in presenting it. Yet, if it were possible to connect their points of reference to one another, like some huge Sunday paper puzzle, I think a very complementary pattern would soon emerge: the ancient pattern of *yin* and *yang*.

Kafka is *yin*. Deep, yielding, receiving. Like the earth spirit of *yin*, his creations are at the receiving end of a malign force over which they have no power, or even understanding. They are "Jobs" at the mercy of a cruel Yahweh.

Lovecraft is *yang*. Aggressive, rational. *Yin* is to earth as *yang* is to heaven. Heaven has always been associated with vastness; the eternity above our heads. Lovecraft writes of vastness. He brings us cosmic wars on gigantic scales. His protagonists are scientists. They are aggressive in their explorations and experiments. They are almost superhuman in their attempts to make the mysterious rational and controllable.

We are all products of a particular time and place. Lovecraft and Kafka are no exceptions, and it is this very particularity which gives

¹"A Colin Wilson Sampler", *The Twilight Zone*, April 1983, p. 31.

²J. Vernon Shea, "On the Literary Influences Which Shaped Lovecraft's Works", in S. T. Joshi, ed., *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism* (1980), p. 137.

their work its stylistic differences, though at their cores each author speaks the same language.

Lovecraft's tales are embedded in the culture in which he grew up. Even though he felt emotionally connected to the Rationalism of the eighteenth century, his stories are full of the Puritan Work Ethic which dominated American society in the early 1900s. His heroes really work at making the unknowable knowable. They break their necks exploring and experimenting. No matter how hideous or horrible the situation becomes, they are convinced that there must be a knowable reason behind it. If only the right book is found, the ultimate answer will be made clear.

In Kafka, the book never can be found. His universe exists in the space between the pages; it is like trying to read the morning paper with an electron microscope. Unlike the explorer/scientists of Lovecraft, Kafka's protagonists stagnate themselves in the dissection of details. This dividing and subdividing aspect in Kafka stems from the tradition of Talmudic scholarship where the fine points of Jewish civil and religious law are constantly being refined and questioned. This tradition begins with a very narrow, almost absurd question like, "Is it permissible to eat an egg laid on the Sabbath day?"

Using this as its starting point, it branches out into a wide-reaching study of man and his relationship to Divine Law. Kafka puts the weight of Divine Law on top of our heads, and lets it slowly crush the vertebrae.

You cannot see the forest through the trees in Kafka, because he is too busy examining the bugs in the bark. Lovecraft not only shows us the entire forest, but transforms that mass of leaves and branches into a living, breathing thing; the tip of some other-dimensional iceberg.

Lovecraft's stories reflect *yang* in their sense of adventure. He writes of quests; penetrations into forbidden knowledge no matter what the cost.

In Kafka, the element of adventure has been stripped away and replaced with the *yin* of obsequiousness. While Lovecraft explores the *yang* of a mindless, aggressive universe, Kafka quietly takes us inside the *yin* of internal madness, letting us look into its pulsing heart.

Lovecraft and Kafka are twin roads traveling through different realms, lined with different stones, which ultimately reach the same goal. That goal is the meaning of *yin* and *yang*; an arrival at balance.

Lovecraft and Kafka both write of madness and alienation. It could be argued that these concepts form the core of their creations, sort of an endless improvisation over the same dark chords. Theirs is not the most uplifting of themes, yet they continue to strike a basic response in the hearts and minds of many, many readers.

Yin and *yang* show balance.

No matter how absurd or unsettling life sometimes becomes, the works of Kafka and Lovecraft will take it a step or two further, thereby redefining the absurdity and making it easier to cope with. It doesn't really matter that their techniques are polar opposites; the result is the same. In fact, it is this very opposition of styles which draws Lovecraft and Kafka into the *yin* and *yang* embrace.

Continued on p. 71

The Development of Lovecraftian Studies 1971-1982 (Part I)

by S. T. Joshi

[A portion of this essay appeared in the previous issue of *Lovecraft Studies* under the title "Lovecraft in the Foreign Press, 1971-1982"; the following is the first section of the essay, and will be succeeded by two further instalments in the next two issues of *Lovecraft Studies*.—S.T.J.]



In the last year of his life August Derleth wrote what is perhaps his best article on Lovecraft, "H. P. Lovecraft: The Making of a Literary Reputation, 1937-1971"; and although the article was not published until 1977,¹ its importance derives from the fact that Derleth was in the forefront—indeed, was frequently the cause—of Lovecraft's burgeoning posthumous fame and reputation. Derleth's accomplishments in the field of Lovecraftian studies have, since his death in 1971, come under increasing attack: while it is true that he alone of Lovecraft's colleagues had both the diligence and the independent reputation (as, for example, R. H. Barlow did not) to establish Lovecraft, however humbly, in the literary world, certain of his other qualities and actions have not won him respect—his frequently unscrupulous control of Arkham House and of the Lovecraft copyrights; his misconceived attempt to further Lovecraft's fame through his "posthumous collaborations" with Lovecraft; his continual dissemination of dogmatic and highly erroneous views about Lovecraft the man and writer. Derleth's effect upon the development of critical interpretation of Lovecraft's life and work will be considered in a later section, but there can be no question of his success in collecting and publishing Lovecraft's work in book form—although even here his efforts were marred by hasty and slipshod practises which produced appalling corruptions in Lovecraft's texts—and his putting Lovecraft upon the literary map. The mere fact that we can now look upon his achievements in so ambiguous a light demonstrates the enormous strides which the field of Lovecraftian studies has taken in a mere decade. The work of the Lovecraft scholars of today could hardly have been imagined by Derleth or anyone else even twenty years ago; and there is no need to berate Derleth for his failings when, without his actions, it is likely that modern Lovecraft scholarship would not exist at all in its present state. The work of Derleth was

¹In *Books at Brown*, 25 (1977) 13-25; item III-D-158 in my bibliography (Kent State University Press, 1981). Subsequently books and articles will be cited by their entry numbers in this volume, to which the reader is referred for full bibliographic information. The indication "Suppl." refers to the Supplement at the rear of the bibliography. A full supplement covering the years 1980-1983 is in preparation by L. D. Blackmore and myself.

a necessary link in the chain that will lead to Lovecraft's full recognition as a writer of major stature in this century. We all wish that Derleth could have done certain things better; but most of his mistakes have been rectified without great difficulty, while his diligence and zeal will always give him a place in the history of Lovecraftian studies.

I have chosen to write this article for several reasons: firstly, I have myself simply been involved with the leading trends in Lovecraft criticism since at least 1975; secondly, I feel that we are on the threshold of a new picture of Lovecraft, in which Lovecraft will be seen both as a figure of great popular appeal and of substantial literary and philosophical merit. This period of transition—which, sad to say, almost required August Derleth's death to initiate—is of enormous interest, and all Lovecraft scholars in the forefront of the field are filled with an enthusiasm for their subject which is hard to describe but easy to feel. The nearest parallel is, perhaps, with the classical scholars of the early Renaissance, who realised that they were rediscovering lost works of supreme greatness and brushing from them the cobwebs of misunderstanding which had enshrouded them for centuries. The parallel is instructive in more than one way; for not only were Lovecraft's texts as corrupt as were the great Latin and Greek treatises after centuries of haphazard transmission, but modern Lovecraft scholars are at last probing the depths of Lovecraft's work and thought to a level far beyond that of prior decades; so that he is coming to be regarded not merely as a skilful weaver of tales, but one whose work is almost inexhaustibly rich in substance and texture—work which is not merely superior to other works in the tiny genre of fantasy fiction, but which need fear no comparison from the greatest products of modern literature. It is only because trained literary scholars are finally exploring Lovecraft's work that he is emerging from the level of mere "fan" criticism to actual recognition in the broader context of contemporary world literature. This process is by no means complete, and I am still overwhelmed at how much there is to do in Lovecraft studies; moreover, Lovecraft's reputation is still by no means as firmly established as it deserves. We are, as I say, in a period of transition; and it is in the hope that the details of this transition may some day be of interest to future scholars that I am writing this account.

I. The Dissemination of Lovecraft's Work

A. In English

As the decade of the 1970s opened, Arkham House was still alone in the publication of Lovecraft's work in hardcover; indeed, it retains that status today, even though it seems to have given up the publication of new works by Lovecraft. It is, in a way, unfortunate that Derleth and Wandrei decided to establish Arkham House at all; for it thereby became a "specialty firm" which eventually accumulated a devoted following of aficionados but which was separated from the main trends in the publishing industry at large. One supposes that Derleth could perhaps have tried rather

harder at the start to have Lovecraft published by a major commercial firm—certainly Lovecraft himself had come close to such an achievement in his own lifetime. The publication of all Lovecraft's work by Arkham House has established, as it were, a barrier which is difficult to cross by those who wish for his work a greater and more distinguished access; the many paperback reprints of his work have been singularly ineffective in convincing major hardcover firms to publish Lovecraft—and, of course, Derleth's over-protective policy regarding the Lovecraft copyrights was as much if not more of a deterrent.

But whatever the case, Arkham House opened the decade with a useful—although incomplete and astonishingly corrupt—edition of Lovecraft's "revisions" and collaborations, *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions* (I-A-52). The third volume of the monumental *Selected Letters* (I-A-59)—the last Lovecraft volume to appear under Derleth's direct supervision—emerged in 1971. This third volume seems by general consent to be regarded as the greatest of the series, not only for its size but for the wealth of brilliant political, literary, and philosophical discussions included in it—including large parts of a 110-page letter to Frank Belknap Long of 27 February 1931.² Certainly no other firm but Arkham House could even have contemplated the publication of such a series of letters, before Lovecraft had achieved any status as a serious literary figure. Some day, of course, the letters will have to be re-edited and published in unabridged form; but the series as it stands will be an invaluable research tool for many years.

After Derleth's death a certain confusion seemed to follow at Arkham House, caused partially by the fact that no competent editor was at hand to succeed Derleth and partially by Donald Wandrei's secession from the firm. This latter circumstance has caused great bitterness on all sides and is an issue into which we need not enter; but I have still not been able to ascertain its precise effect upon the editing of the final two volumes of Lovecraft's letters. By around 1975 James Turner succeeded Roderic Meng as Managing Editor of Arkham House, and he began to undertake the long-overdue task of finishing the *Selected Letters* series. The final two volumes (I-A-68, 69) came out in late summer and autumn of 1976, and met with mixed reactions. Wandrei has maintained that Turner merely adopted the selection Wandrei himself had made for the last two volumes; but I cannot imagine that this is correct, since the editorial method in these two volumes seems so much different from that of their predecessors. An overwhelming bulk of the volumes has been given over to Lovecraft's (admittedly brilliant) discussions of the contemporary political and economic scene, and many literary and philosophical discussions found in surviving manuscript letters of this period have been excluded. Now Turner has professed an interest in such political matters as Lovecraft discussed, and it seems a logical inference that this interest dictated Turner's selection of letters. The volumes, although bulky, have not won general rec-

²This is the last letter to Long included in the series; since the rest of the correspondence—sold by Long to Samuel Loveman—may have been destroyed by Loveman.

ognition, although textually they are far superior to the error-riddled first three volumes.

In catalogues of the period Arkham House announced a supplementary volume of letters (presumably to include letters received too late to be included in the chronological sequence of the series) and an index. These projects were dropped, probably as a consequence of Wandrei's departure from the firm and his launching a suit in connexion with the publication of the letters. When I conceived the idea of compiling an index to the *Selected Letters* in early 1978, I offered it to Arkham House; but Turner replied to me that the project was still being planned for publication. I felt that this was either untrue or that it would take Turner far too long to compile the index, so I went ahead and produced it myself in the summer of 1978; financial difficulties with the Necronomicon Press, however, prevented its appearance until the spring of 1980 (Suppl.). Turner also announced in 1976 a *Miscellaneous Writings* of Lovecraft to appear from Arkham House; this project was still alive in 1978, when Turner mentioned it to me in passing. The contents of this volume have never been ascertained, although scholars hypothesised (correctly, I think) that it would contain merely works by Lovecraft previously published in early Arkham House volumes and not as yet reprinted (including many essays and some unreprinted fiction). I suspect that this project has now been effectively dropped; and Dirk W. Mosig suggested to me that the cause may have been the extensive republication of obscure and early Lovecraftiana by the Necronomicon Press. This may well be right, although many long essays first published in early Arkham House volumes (e.g. "Travels in the Provinces of America", "Some Causes of Self-Immolation") have never been reprinted. Many important works still lie buried in these Arkham House volumes, and their re-printing would serve substantial purpose.

Of other hardcover editions the only notable one was *To Quebec and the Stars* (I-A-72), edited by L. Sprague de Camp. This volume was very poorly received and has not sold at all well; but such a negative response is not entirely just. The volume contained a judicious selection of essays (many, however, already reprinted by the Necronomicon Press) collected by de Camp in the course of work on his Lovecraft biography; it also contained Lovecraft's longest single work, the previously unpublished travelogue of Quebec (1930-31). Both the essays and the travelogue are valuable, but it may have been better had each been published as a separate volume; for their combination into a single book has made its price prohibitively high. De Camp's critical commentary is not especially notable, although he has taken a certain care in the presentation of the text.³

Of *A Winter Wish* (I-A-82), a collection of rare poetry edited by Tom Collins, little need be said. Collins succeeded in finding a great many poems aside from those included in the unfortunately titled *Collected Poems* (I-A-35), and his research in Lovecraft's amateur publications was

³There are still several hundred transcriptional errors in the Quebec travelogue, but this item is perhaps the most difficult to edit of any in the Lovecraft corpus.

notable;⁴ unfortunately, Collins was more careless even than Derleth in the presentation of the texts, and hideous omissions and mistranscriptions mar this otherwise valuable tome.⁵ Much of Lovecraft's poetry is still unpublished or unprinted, and a volume at least as large as *A Winter Wish* could be filled with such work.

Lovecraft's general popularity can be measured by the fluctuations in the mass-market paperback appearances of his work. Of course, only the fiction has hitherto been widely disseminated, although it may not be long before his essays and letters find similar distribution: Panther Books in England was bold enough to include *Supernatural Horror in Literature* in its edition of *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* (I-A-48), and it went through three printings by 1973.⁶ In 1970, however, Random House began two separate but anomalously overlapping paperback editions of Lovecraft's work, one under the imprint of Beagle Books and the other under the more widely known Ballantine Books imprint. Beagle's first volume, *The Tomb* (Dec. 1970; I-A-49), was in fact identical to the Panther Books volume (1969) of the same name, and eventually eleven volumes of the Beagle Edition of H. P. Lovecraft—a trifle misnamed since nearly half the volumes consisted of imitations of Lovecraft's work by other hands—appeared by the end of 1971. Coincidentally with this, Lin Carter edited two impressive collections of Lovecraft's "dream-world" tales for his Adult Fantasy series—*The Dream-Quest of Un-
known Kadath* (May 1970; I-A-51) and *The Doom That Came to Sarnath* (Feb. 1971; I-A-55)—along with the useful anthology, *The Spawn of Cthulhu* (Oct. 1971; I-C-9). In this extensive campaign of reprinting Lovecraft's work may be added the surprising appearance of *Fungi from Yuggoth and Other Poems* (Feb. 1971; a reprint of *Collected Poems* excluding one poem⁷) from Ballantine, although it was unfortunately not kept in print as were the other volumes. By around 1973, however, the Beagle Books imprint went into abeyance, and the volumes of its series were transferred to the Ballantine Books imprint, where they continued to be reprinted through 1976. The importance of this wide availability of Lovecraft's work over five or six years can hardly be overestimated, and it can rightly be said that Love-

⁴Collins was responsible for the attribution of one poem—"North and South Britons" (1919)—to Lovecraft; it was written under a pseudonym in its only publication. See I-B-iii-117.

⁵See my "Textual Commentary on *A Winter Wish*", *The Miskatonic*, 6, no. 2 (February 1978) [11-21]; in augmented form in *Crypt of Cthulhu*, 3, no. 4 (Eastertide 1984). This review and subsequent remarks upon it by Collins, Mosig, and myself caused great agitation and hostility in Lovecraft studies for some years, although the dispute subsequently died down.

⁶I suspect that several more printings followed, but no information has reached me. By 1983, however, all the Panther editions were officially out of print.

⁷The poem excluded, "To the American Flag", has now been coincidentally established as spurious, so that its omission was a happy stroke of fate.

craft's popular appeal has never been higher before or since; the most notable indication being the celebrated review of the Ballantine volumes by Philip Herrera in *Time* magazine for 11 June 1973 (III-F-i-4). Herrera announced that over 1,000,000 copies of the paperback editions had been disseminated—a figure which, however startlingly high it may be, must have been obtained from the publishers. We may assume, then, that about 2,000,000 books were printed during the years 1970-1976; but by 1977, sales must have begun to wane, and it was decided to let the entire series drop. The rather disastrous result was that for several years (roughly 1977 to 1982) Lovecraft disappeared from the bookstores, and his major work could only be obtained in hardcover through Arkham House. Ironically, it was precisely at this time that the emerging scholarly criticism of Lovecraft was bearing fruit through successive volumes devoted to his life and work. I was even once told that Ballantine had let their contract with Arkham House for the paperback rights expire; but if so, they presumably renewed it shortly, and by the middle of 1982 six volumes of Lovecraft's work were again on the stands. These included four from the original Beagle edition (the two volumes of Derleth's "posthumous collaborations" and the two volumes of *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* had been allowed mercifully to vanish) and Carter's two collections. The resulting anomalies (particularly in the overlapping of contents) were not pleasant to behold,⁸ but at least Lovecraft had returned to the public eye.

Both during and after the initial wave of Beagle/Ballantine reprints, other major paperback publishers tried to capitalise on works by Lovecraft not reprinted by Ballantine. The most notable are the two volumes of the famous Lancer/Zebra/Jove editions of Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror* (I-A-37) and *The Colour out of Space* (I-A-38). Lancer published *The Dunwich Horror* in December 1963, and followed with *The Colour out of Space* in June 1964. The former received two further printings, the latter three;⁹ these must have gone out of print by around 1971 or 1972. Zebra Books then purchased the rights to the two volumes, but issued only *The Colour out of Space* in October 1975 (I-A-38b). This edition vanished very quickly, although I recall seeing it in a bookstore as late as 1977. In the course of time the paperback division of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (Jove) obtained the paperback rights to the two volumes and reissued them in April and May of 1978. All know the amusing tale of the Jove *Colour out of Space*, which announced on the cover a preface by Frank Belknap Long but failed to include it; these copies were withdrawn very quickly and a second printing was hastily issued in August 1978 containing the preface. But even these volumes vanished from the shelves almost instantaneously; and it was the more tragic because they surely contained the best of Lovecraft's non-novel-length fiction.

Since at least 1980, when scholars began to notice that the Jove editions would not be reprinted, efforts were undertaken to issue—or, rather,

⁸See my review in *Lovecraft Studies*, 2, no. 1 (Spring 1982) 38-39.

⁹For the mysterious fourth printing of *The Colour out of Space* see my bibliography, I-A-38a4.

to persuade a major paperback house to issue—an omnibus of Lovecraft's best work. This finally occurred in October 1982, with the appearance of *The Best of H. P. Lovecraft: Bloodcurdling Tales of Horror and the Macabre* from Ballantine. Behind this volume, however, lies a wealth of detail which may shed light on the difficulties involved in getting Lovecraft published in a commercial but non-popular format. As early as 1977 I began giving thought to compiling a *Portable Lovecraft* for Viking Press (now Viking/Penguin), which would contain not only his greatest fiction but also his best essays, poetry, and correspondence. By this time, too, I had virtually completed my preliminary textual work on Lovecraft's fiction and had restored it to a state at least far closer to what Lovecraft intended than the version produced by Derleth. My initial enquiry with Viking produced no results, but in 1980 Marc A. Michaud urged me to try again; we actually compiled a rough list of items to be included in the volume. With the assistance of Marc's brother Paul R. Michaud, we made contact with Viking/Penguin; and, although the idea of a *Portable Lovecraft* was ruled out rather early, the firm was still considering the issuance of a very large omnibus volume which would contain nearly all Lovecraft's fiction (perhaps something like the Italian *Opere Complete*)—ultimately, however, the negotiations fell through. Rather later, in the summer of 1981, I began separate enquiries with Dutton Paperbacks for a similar omnibus volume. At first Dutton appeared to be interested, and actually requested to see some of Lovecraft's fiction which would be included in such a volume; but their queries eventually confirmed that Ballantine had already negotiated (or re-negotiated) the paperback rights and was planning to reissue their series; hence Dutton was compelled to drop the project. Eventually word got about that Ballantine, in addition to reissuing its six-volume paperback series, was also planning an omnibus of Lovecraft's best work; moreover, Robert Bloch had been selected to write an introduction for the volume. Much confusion ensued at this point, for Bloch was under the impression¹⁰ that Michaud—who was in touch with Lester Del Rey, editor of the fantasy/science-fiction line at Ballantine—was to edit the volume, and that I would provide my corrected texts for printing. Michaud and I had already made a selection for such a volume, but neither of us was contacted in connexion with it. Apparently Bloch had himself made a list of tales for inclusion (very similar to the contents of the Arkham House *Dunwich Horror and Others*, I-A-34), and this turned out to be the one used for the volume. It was certainly strange that Ballantine did not choose to use the corrected texts for the edition (although some corrections were derived from a superficially corrected fifth printing of *The Dunwich Horror*), since they were so easily available and since the volume was entirely reset in any case; but at least the long-awaited volume had appeared, and in a format not entirely unsuited (save for its lurid subtitle) to the dignity of Lovecraft's work. A *Portable Lovecraft* still remains a worthwhile goal, and I am now giving thought to compiling a collection of Lovecraft's Selected

¹⁰See his letter to the editor in *Crypt of Cthulhu*, 1, no. 4 (Eas-tertide 1982) 36.

Essays; although this latter will almost certainly never reach the mass-market paperback stage.

Of other paperback appearances (aside from the Scholastic Book Services edition of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* [1971; I-A-58], which has been kept in print and which was edited by Lovecraft's correspondent Margaret Sylvester, now Margaret Ronan) all have been from small "specialty firms" within the fantasy field, hence have added little to Lovecraft's literary stature, although they have made available some rare and obscure works. Several of these volumes—*Hail, Klarkash-Ton!* (1971; I-A-56), a collection of nine postcards from Lovecraft to Clark Ashton Smith assembled by Roy A. Squires; *Medusa: A Portrait* (1975; I-A-66), reprinting Lovecraft's poem of that title; *Antarktos* (1977; I-A-74), a reprint of the sonnet in the *Fungi from Yuggoth*; and *Squires' reprint of The Cats of Ulthar* (1979; Suppl.)—were directed specifically toward collectors and contain no notable features save elegant printing and illustration; although Tom Collins' afterward to the *Medusa* pamphlet was enlightening on the origin of that poem. Scarcely more substantial was Gerry de la Ree's publication of an autobiographical letter by Lovecraft (probably to Wilfred B. Talman) under the title *E'ch-Pi-El Speaks* (1972; I-A-60), which said little that we did not know from previously available sources. On a more scholarly level was the unfortunately titled *Occult Lovecraft* (1975; I-A-63), assembled by Anthony Raven. This pamphlet, although highly criticised, actually contains much useful information, including parts of a letter (or letters) by Lovecraft under the title "The Cosmos and Religion" and "The Incantation from Red Hook" (providing Lovecraft's explanation—sometimes erroneous—of the incantation he included in "The Horror at Red Hook"), memoirs by Frank Belknap Long and Samuel Loveman, and interpretative essays by Raven. We need not have been told by Raven that Lovecraft's knowledge of occultism was superficial—although it might have benefited Philip A. Shreffler had he borne this in mind (see Part III of this essay). Finally, note can be made of two facsimile publications: Willis Conover's facsimile (1974) of the T.Ms. of Lovecraft's abridgement of *Supernatural Horror in Literature* in 1936 (I-A-36), and R. Alain Everts' facsimile and transcription of an A.Ms. of "The Statement of Randolph Carter" (I-A-73). This A.Ms. (although not the original draft) predates the surviving T.Ms. in the John Hay Library, so that some divergences between the standard printed version (deriving ultimately from the T.Ms.) and the A.Ms. as noted by Everts are due to later revision by Lovecraft; otherwise, Everts' introduction is competent and important for being one of the first indications of the severe textual corruption of Lovecraft's fiction.¹¹

But the leader of specialty firms in the Lovecraft field since at

¹¹Stuart D. Schiff also reprinted in facsimile a late A.Ms. of "The White Ship" in *Whispers* (I-B-i-65). This A.Ms. was copied over (presumably from the surviving T.Ms. in the John Hay Library) by Lovecraft late in his life for Alvin Earl Perry. In addition to a few stenographic errors, it seems to contain a few wilful revisions (although generally only in terms of punctuation) which must be incorporated into any text claiming to be definitive.

least 1977 has been the Necronomicon Press, founded and edited by Marc A. Michaud. It would, I suppose, be rather inelegant of me to sing its praises too highly, for I have myself been closely connected with the firm almost since its inception; but Michaud's industriousness and his desire to publish large quantities of Lovecraftiana at the most inexpensive price deserve the highest commendation. The early publications of the firm are almost embarrassingly crude but still enormously useful, especially *The Conservative* (1976, 1977; I-A-70) and the monumental *Writings in The United Amateur* (1976; I-A-71). The bitter controversy and legal imbroglia resulting from the publication of the first edition of *The Conservative* need not here be explored; but the unavailability of this important body of work will shortly be nullified by a third edition of *The Conservative* edited by me. Michaud's earliest works through 1977 were facsimile reprints of amateur journalism items by and about Lovecraft, and of the later volumes *The Californian* (1977; I-A-75) was the most useful. By the end of 1977 Michaud began to experiment with a reset design, although the earliest specimens were not well conceived: the frivolous *Collapsing Cosmoses* (1977; I-A-79) and the error-riddled *Fungi from Yuggoth* (1977; I-A-81; a new, corrected edition was issued in 1982). Finally Michaud and I collaborated on the first volume of *Uncollected Prose and Poetry* (1978; I-A-83), although at the time we had no idea of compiling any more such volumes. This volume, although also typographically inferior, included many obscure items unearthed by my colleagues and myself in the course of my bibliographic work. The volume's success led to the publication of two further collections (1980 [Suppl.], 1982), each in its critical and textual accuracy better than the last, since we always tried to learn from our mistakes. A fourth volume may be forthcoming.

In the meantime, however, Michaud had not abandoned the notion of facsimile publication, and some of his happier later ventures were facsimiles of R. H. Barlow's rare edition of *The Cats of Ulthar* (1977; I-A-8b); *Looking Backward* (1980; I-A-3b; a reprint not of the pamphlet of 1920 but of the magazine appearance of 1944); the useful *Notes and Commonplace Book* (1977; I-A-14b); and the very successful *A History of the Necronomicon* (1977, 1977, 1980 [I-A-13b-c]—the last with an afterword by me). Michaud had also branched into the publication of Lovecraft criticism, both reprinted and original; indeed, it is these volumes (for which see Part III) which have been perhaps of most service to the scholarly field. This enormous activity, which sometimes resulted in the publishing of up to ten books and pamphlets a year (although the pace slowed in 1980-81 due to financial difficulties), has been vital in keeping Lovecraft in the forefront of attention—at least within the fantasy field—during an otherwise fallow period in publications of Lovecraft's work; and Michaud's efforts have not gone without notice in the wider literary world.¹²

Of other reprints note may be made of R. Alain Everts' reissue of the seven-volume *Lovecraft Collectors Library* in one volume (1979; I-A-

¹²Cf. the notices of his work in *The New York Times Book Review* for 9 August 1981 and *The Chicago Tribune*, 27 October 1982, section 4, p. 6.

28b) and, more noticeably, the reprint of the second Ben Abramson edition (1945) of *Supernatural Horror in Literature* by Dover (1973; I-A-21b). This latter volume, still in print, also kept Lovecraft's name visible during the five-year absence of the Ballantine paperbacks; and is still not without use today, although I have since prepared a critical edition of the work with a revised text.

Continued from p. 61

When we observe absurdity or alienation or madness through the *yin* and *yang* visions of Kafka and Lovecraft, they become part of a larger picture. If, for example, alienation were some unsharable experience, its horror would be beyond human tolerance. But both Lovecraft and Kafka have the tools to chisel out a picture of alienation upon the human psyche. Once they do, the concept becomes easier to deal with. It becomes part of the balancing act of existence, which is beautifully illustrated by *yin* and *yang*.

Yin and *yang* show balance.

Irony is also an earmark of Lovecraft and Kafka, and it has always seemed ironic that they are able to present such troubling themes in such engrossing and downright entertaining ways. While priests try to scare the pants off us, and politicians try to blind us, poets like Lovecraft and Kafka show us the *yin* and *yang* of love and hate, life and death, awareness and madness in all their naked glories.

The *yin* and *yang* of Franz and Howard are part of an eternal lifeline which finally must meet itself, completing the round of existence.

BRIEFLY NOTED

German Lovecraft studies have been active of late, and, in addition to several anthological appearances of Lovecraft's work—most recently Franz Rottensteiner's *Phantastische Träume* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), containing "The Colour out of Space"—there has recently appeared a fine anthology of criticism, *H. P. Lovecraft: Der Poet des Grauens*, edited by Hans Joachim Alpers (Meitingen: Corian-Verlag, 1983). Aside from containing translations of several letters, essays, and stories by Lovecraft, the volume includes essays on Lovecraft by Werner Berthel, Marek Wydmuch, Dietrich Wachler, Dirk W. Mosig, and Thomas M. Loock, along with a superb bibliography of German Lovecraftiana by Kalju Kirde. Franz Rottensteiner is currently editing another collection of essays on Lovecraft, to appear at the end of the year.

Notes to "The Challenge from Beyond"

by H. P. Lovecraft

[Prefacing the manuscript of Lovecraft's contribution to the round-robin tale "The Challenge from Beyond" (1935) are a few pages of notes outlining the plot of his section. This is reproduced below, although it has not been possible to reproduce the illustrations made by Lovecraft of the creatures described in the story.—S.T.J.]



n a far orb in a distant galaxy dwell a vastly superior race of semi-material beings who navigate their own galaxy but cannot navigate others. They have extirpated every other form of life which once tenanted their galaxy since in the past a low form once discovered space navigation and menaced this race. They cannot navigate *beyond* their own galaxy in physical person, but can launch into space certain objects of communication which will enable them to project their minds to any trans-galactic region where these objects may chance to alight. Only a few, of course, ever land anywhere—and when one does land it is useless unless it can be set working by contact with a local living intelligence—which must reach it by gliding along a beam of light. These objects—inscribed discs enclosed in peculiar crystal—are so arranged as to attract and fascinate intelligences wherever they may fall. When a local intelligence responds and correlates on any of these objects, it is sucked in and projected to the world of the beings—taking up its abode (without senses) in a machine—one of a prodigious number along the walls of a vast edifice. Each machine is attuned to one of the sent-forth objects, and glows with violet light whenever a distant intelligence enters the corresponding object where it has landed. The machines are watched by a special official; and when one glows another official—an investigator—gets into telepathic communication with it and learns all it knows. Meanwhile the body of the questioned being remains on its distant orb in a coma before the object its mind has entered. After the investigator has pumped the mind of its contents, he projects his own mind through space (and through the two machines, one at each end) into the inert body of the distant being—thus landing, as it were, on the far planet. He can also carry the object around and ensnare any number of others—the mind of each being exchanged with that of a member of the mighty race. Machine can hold more than one mind—so that one cube on a distant planet can trap any number of beings rapidly. During the stage of complete exchange, the mind of the captured being remains *in the body of its displacer*—not in the wall machine—the process consisting of 2 transfers: (a) distant being to wall machine, (b) investigator exchanging with wall machine, (c) wall machine exchanging with vacant body of distant being.

On several occasions planets were completely overrun and subjugated by this means—the advanced race once voluntarily remaining in its new region and bodies after the killing off of the misplaced native stock. Return accomplished in corresponding way. Extirpation accomplished by killing of distant body (quasi-suicide) at moment of return. Bodiless distant mind then returns to machine and is annihilated unless some use for it exists. Race has found by experience that certain beings are pestiferous and destructive, hence mean to kill all they find after exhausting their knowledge for historical records. All, that is, who shew any signs of being able to navigate space and thus overrun universe.

Aeons ago, when cone-shaped Great Race inhabited earth, a cube from the outsiders reached the earth. It drew several minds away, but the race were so advanced that they recognised the alienage of the usurping minds in the affected bodies and destroyed them after torture—sacrificing the exiled minds of their own people. Casting back in time and exchanging minds with other-planetarians, they discovered roughly what was occurring, and kept the cube as a relique safely shut away from the public. Occasional lawless or adventurous souls tried to meddle with it, once or twice succeeding—but always found out. If succeeding, were left in exile while bodies with usurping minds killed. Back on outside world, knowledge of the Great Race gained from these exiled captives—they know that their explorers have been killed, and long for revenge, but have no way of getting it. Naturally they keep the earth bombarded with cubes as best they can calculate, but none ever lands again. Those parts of this business which can be known on earth are handed down in the disquieting and debatable Eltdown Shards.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Perhaps the most bountiful Lovecraftian activity in the foreign press is occurring in Japan, where Kokusho Kankokai of Tokyo has published an eight-volume edition of tales of the Cthulhu Mythos both by Lovecraft and by other writers. The last two volumes of this series—published in December 1983 and January 1984 respectively—are a translation of S. T. Joshi's anthology, *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism* (1980). Under the editorship of Masaki Abe, this two-volume set also contains translations of some items from *The Occult Lovecraft* (1975), plus information on other American Lovecraft work by Abe. The same publisher has begun plans for issuing a ten-volume edition of Lovecraft's fiction, essays, and letters, for which S. T. Joshi has provided many of his corrected texts. The edition should commence publication in June 1984.

Review

DONALD R. BURLESON. *H. P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*. (Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 5.) Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983. 243 pp. \$29.95 hc. Reviewed by Robert M. Price and S. T. Joshi.

Readers of Donald R. Burleson's previous works *Four-Dimensional Tic-Tac-Toe* and *Elementary Statistics* will find a surprise awaiting them in this volume, but the rest of us who have followed Professor Burleson's growing collection of essays in Lovecraft criticism will be surprised neither at the subject matter of *H. P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study* nor at the skill with which the author treats it.

This work, the latest in a welcome new series of critical surveys and studies of Lovecraft's work, has many excellent features. The chronological format is the first of them. By examining Lovecraft's stories and poems as they were written Burleson is able both to trace Lovecraft's artistic growth and to explode myths such as that Lovecraft had a Dunsanian "period" (instead he simply wrote tales of that distinctive type interspersed with others through the years). This approach also discloses interesting facts such as that Miskatonic University first appeared in "Herbert West—Reanimator"! (Burleson might have noted that Yog-Sothoth first appeared, surprisingly, in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.)

Burleson has rejected the "topical" format, but he has managed not to forfeit the chief benefit of that approach, i.e., comparison of various stories in terms of common themes. He attains the same result by an extensive use of cross-references. He makes many helpful comparisons, e.g., how several stories handle the theme of unnatural longevity. His discussion of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* looks forward to that of "The Thing on the Doorstep", and while treating the latter, he glances back to the former.

One of the most helpful instances of this cross-referencing concerns what Burleson calls Lovecraft's aesthetic of "ironic impressionism", the notion that the narrator's curiosity and intelligence prompt him to investigate and finally understand only the terrible insignificance of his place in the scheme of things. Indeed, one of the greatest advances in recent Lovecraftian scholarship is the discovery of how thoroughly Lovecraft's fiction embodies his "futilitarian" outlook of "cosmicism". Burleson never fails to indicate how particular works reflect this philosophy. His commentary is extremely illuminating for the reader's seeking deeper understanding of Lovecraft.

A survey of an author's stories inevitably entails a good amount of summarization, something often dangerous in works of this kind, as the reader does not want to find himself wading through (expensive) pages of already-familiar information. But Burleson has been able to synopsise key tales with remarkable conciseness, in the process quoting just the

right words and phrases to convey the story's atmosphere, and not merely its plot-outline. This is no mean feat. And Burleson's exegesis of the stories is often quite enlightening, even to those who would think themselves to be familiar with the stories. Sometimes he draws attention to delicate bits of foreshadowing that, for all our talk about Lovecraft's making things overly obvious, we may have missed. Other times he points out subtle images such as in "The Shadow over Innsmouth", where the narrator's first glimpse of the town includes the sight of decrepit church steeples missing their clock-faces and outlined against the ocean: an effective symbol of Innsmouth's eternal isolation from the normal history of the outside world. One more arresting insight concerns the ultimate identity of the immortally migrating villain in "The Thing on the Doorstep". Burleson points out hints in the text that we must look behind and beyond even Ephraim Waite for the true identity of the evil intelligence, as if the old sorcerer might himself be one more victim in a chain with no visible beginning.

Burleson's explication of the texts is all the more helpful for the extensive background information he has unearthed. His liberal quotation of Lovecraft's epistolary comments on his own stories sheds much light. And the author's many personal visits to real sites only slightly fictionalized in the stories provide such intriguing details as that there actually is a ladder leading to a trap-door in the steeple of the church on Federal Hill! (If Burleson discovered Anything within, he's keeping mum.)

"You can't please everybody," especially reviewers, since any of that peevish breed will be on the lookout for things over which to quibble, and here are a few. The reader may find slightly irritating the frequent recurrence of pieces of literary-critical jargon like "fictive", "imagistic", "adumbration", "oeuvre", "emotionalities" (instead of "emotions") and the odd use of "imagery" as a specific singular (e.g., "an imagery"). Such offbeat word-forms have no particular function as tools for elucidating the subject matter; they tend instead to focus the reader's attention on the discussion itself, as if to remind him that "this is 'literary criticism'."

More important, Burleson sometimes introduces interpretative devices of questionable propriety. A singular example of this tendency is the application to "The Music of Erich Zann" of Douglas Hofstadter's pattern-hunting approach in *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, with the result that the structure of "Erich Zann" is seen to resemble that of a musical fugue, presumably like that played by Zann. This speculation might better have been retired after its initial appearance in Burleson's article "The Music of Erich Zann" as Fugue" (note again that academically trendy omission of the indefinite article: why not "as a Fugue"?).

Though others will disagree, this reviewer also questions the relevance of "Jungian criticism" (applied here to "The Outsider", "The Rats in the Walls", *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, "The Shadow out of Time", and "The Shadow over Innsmouth"). One might better call it "Jungian allegorizing", for this more often seems to be going on. Suppose one can

point out correspondences here and there between features of a story and features of the Jungian schema (and granted, sometimes one can), in what sense can the story be said to be "about" this? Surely the Jungian approach to literature is really using literary texts as evidence for something else, i.e., the validity of Jung's archetypes, etc.

No less jarring is Burleson's treatment of "The Dunwich Horror". Throughout the book, Burleson aptly notes the controlling influence of Lovecraft's cosmic pessimism on his fiction, so that "good" and "evil" are seen to be a sham and the human protagonists are doomed from the start. Yet Burleson is offended when on occasion Lovecraft will not play by his own rules and, as in "The Dunwich Horror", lets the good guys win. As is often the case with zealous disciples and apologists, Burleson "out-Lovecrafts Lovecraft" by trying to harmonize the story, which he admits "runs mawkishly contrary to the precepts of the Lovecraft Mythos". So the story cannot mean what it says. Burleson wheels in "mythic" criticism, and under his skillful hands "the story undergoes a startling reversal in meaning". Indeed it does. On the strength of the story's supposed correspondence with the "mythic hero archetype", the Whateley twins may be judged the winners and Dr. Henry Armitage the loser! This type of reinterpretation underlines the danger of what the late Samuel Sandmel called "parallelomania". Can we really imagine Lovecraft constructing the tale with all this in mind? And if he didn't, what are we getting at in employing such literary-critical gematria?

Burleson is so embarrassed by the "good versus evil" conventionalism of "The Dunwich Horror" that he suggests Lovecraft may actually have written it as a derisive condescension to Farnsworth Wright and the *Weird Tales* readership. Yet there is no evidence of this; on the contrary, Lovecraft himself regarded the tale as being "so fiendish that Wright may not dare to print it" (SL II.240). And as for the ending, why the Whateley twins are defeated, Lovecraft tells us plainly. "Whenever a fantastic tale introduces a horror which, if unchecked, would shortly produce strikingly visible results throughout the earth, it is necessary to explain why these results have not occurred—necessary, in short, to check the full action of the thing. . . . And in *Dunwich* I had full artificial destruction. . . ." (SL III.213).

By now it is obvious that there is much in Professor Burleson's book to enlighten and to provoke thought. Burleson's is a fertile and creative mind which has energetically researched background data most people would never even have thought of, applied it to his thorough-going conversance with the texts, and experimented with a wide range of resources for interpretation. The resulting book is a welcome addition to the small but growing shelf of Lovecraft criticism.

—ROBERT M. PRICE

Throughout the 1970s we were bombarded with valiant but inept attempts at Lovecraft criticism by self-appointed critics who in reality knew not the first thing about criticism: with the happy exception of Maurice Lévy's fine *Lovecraft ou du fantastique* (1972), it is painful to recall such things as Carter's *Look behind the "Cthulhu Mythos"*, Gatto's *Monarch Note on Lovecraft*, Shreffler's *H. P. Lovecraft Companion*, and, perhaps the worst of them all, Schweitzer's *Dream Quest of H. P. Lovecraft*. Hence one's first reaction after finishing this new study of Lovecraft is simply relief: here at last is a competent scholar who knows Lovecraft, knows literary criticism, and can unite the two into a penetrating study which will certainly rival Lévy's book as the finest single treatment of Lovecraft.

There are so many good things about this book that one hardly knows where to start listing them. Perhaps the most important is simply Burleson's (generally) sane and level-headed approach: he lets Lovecraft speak for himself, instead of arrogantly assuming that Lovecraft really meant this when he says that (something I find with annoying frequency in the work of the otherwise brilliant Prof. St Armand). The result is that Burleson understands the cosmic scope of Lovecraft's work, and indeed expresses it as well as I've ever heard it: "The horror, ultimately, in a Lovecraft tale is not some gelatinous lurker in dark places, but rather the realisation, by the characters involved, of their helplessness and their insignificance in the scheme of things—their terribly ironic predicament of being sufficiently well-developed organisms to perceive and feel the poignancy of their own motelike unimportance in a blind and chaotic universe which neither loves them nor even finds them worthy of notice, let alone hatred or hostility" (p. 12). This seems to me exactly right, and it leads Burleson to the following important conclusion: "This ironic capability to sense one's own vanishingly small place in the universe is the central feature of the Lovecraft Mythos and constitutes an effect virtually unprecedented in literature" (p. 14). With this general overview of Lovecraft's work, it is rare that Burleson goes astray in the interpretation of individual tales and poems.

Burleson's thorough training in academic literary criticism leads him to make further breakthroughs which should have been made long ago: the notion of "ironic impressionism" as central to Lovecraft's approach; the frequent Lovecraftian use of the unreliable narrator whose words we are compelled to disbelieve, with the result that superb tension is created; the failure of several of Lovecraft's early satiric tales ("The Terrible Old Man", "In the Vault") due to a very heavy-handed irony and excessive authorial editorialising by which "Lovecraft unwittingly emulates the . . . nineteenth-century novels that he so disliked" (p. 106); the astonishing influence of Milton upon the opening of "The Colour out of Space" (p. 136); and, perhaps most brilliant of all, the employment of myth criticism to produce a revised interpretation of "The Dunwich Horror", whereby the Whateley twins are seen as the real "heroes" of the tale and Dr Armitage a mere buffoon. I am not, however, entirely convinced that Lovecraft openly intended satire on *Weird Tales* stories using the naive "good vs. evil" dichotomy which the surface reading of the tale appears to embody,

but nevertheless Burleson's analysis is, I find, even more convincing than that presented in his *Lovecraft Studies* article of a few years ago.

Any faults detectable in this book can only be faults of detail. My only general complaint is the amount of space spent upon plot description—which oftentimes has nothing to do with the analysis of the tale, and which any reader well versed in Lovecraft's work will find a little tedious. Indeed, there is a certain ambiguity in the assumed audience for this book: surely it cannot have been intended for those who have no knowledge whatever of Lovecraft, since the very technical discussions of certain points would be utterly incomprehensible to such persons; and we all wish for a critic of Burleson's acuteness more space for real analysis of the works in question. There moreover seems to be a certain lack of coherent structure in the book: the chronological approach adopted by Burleson is eminently sensible, but there is the danger of the book's becoming a mere *vade mecum* to Lovecraft—a description of one work after the other without any space devoted to unification and general analysis. Burleson's "Epilogue" is eloquent in stating Lovecraft's value as an artist, but perhaps much more space could have been given to tying together the various themes running through Lovecraft's work. Finally, the bibliography is unusually brief—there is nothing at all by Dirk W. Mosig or Robert M. Price, although some of Mosig's works are cited in the notes, and it is cluttered with references to books by Poe, Machen, Dunsany, etc., which really need not have been included. There is much more valuable Lovecraft criticism than is listed here. A corollary to this is Burleson's intermittent failure to acknowledge other scholars' contributions: the most startling is his omitting to note St Armand's discovery of the passage in Jung's *Man and His Symbols* describing a dream by Jung which oddly parallels "The Rats in the Walls"; and in his analysis of "The Thing on the Doorstep" Burleson fails to note that the possibility of Edward Derby's being an amalgam of Lovecraft and Alfred Galpin (p. 181) was derived from my article "Autobiography in Lovecraft". Burleson is elsewhere profuse in his acknowledgement of my assistance to him, hence I must attribute these lapses to oversight.

A very quick rundown of other minor errors: Lovecraft did not meet Donald or Howard Wandrei during his initial New York period of 1924-26 (p. 7); Lovecraft did more than write "a certain amount of poetry" (p. 35)—it fills well over 500 pages; "Nemesis" surely dates to late 1917 (cf. SL I.51), not June 1918 (p. 35—I confess that this was an error I initially made in my chronology of Lovecraft's works); Lovecraft did not actually consult Pigafetta's *Regnum Congo*, but got information on it through an essay by T. H. Huxley (p. 44); Lovecraft was surely not familiar with the theories of Jung when he wrote "The Rats in the Walls", as Burleson seems to imply on p. 56—his knowledge came only in the late 1920s; it is unlikely that Walter de la Poer's name was derived from Walter de la Mare (p. 58), since Lovecraft had not read any of de la Mare's works by 1923 (cf. SL II.53); the Latin phrase *ex oblivione* more probably means "from oblivion", rather than "out of oblivion" (i.e. of life), hence probably refers to the narrator's telling his account when he is already in oblivion (p. 74); "Herbert West—Reanimator" was only Lovecraft's first pro-

fessionally published story (p. 78), as he had published some poems professionally in the late 1910s; I suspect that what Edward Derby, in "The Thing on the Doorstep", is trying to say over the telephone at the end is simply *his own name*, "Ed-ward": the ms. reading is actually "*glub-glub*", not "*glub . . . glub*", making it unlikely that Derby is trying to imitate his old three-and-two knock (p. 183), a strange thing to do over the phone anyway; a much closer model for Zadok Allen in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" than the old Civil War veteran known by Lovecraft in his youth (p. 195) is a character in Herbert S. Gorman's novel *The Place Called Gagon* (1927), which clearly influenced Lovecraft; finally, it is surely not "virtually certain" (p. 221) that Lovecraft derived the idea of the *Necronomicon* from Hawthorne, although this is a likely enough source: in all probability this complex idea was drawn from many diverse sources.

The above criticisms clearly shew how solid is Burleson's achievement: there may be chinks here and there, but the armour overall stands firm. Nearly every page contains some enlightening note on a tale or poem (indeed, Burleson's study of several key Lovecraft poems is one of the great virtues of his book); and throughout we feel the hand of a master critic who has thoroughly grasped his subject and strives to convey the excitement and admiration he feels for it. The very simple title of this book is fitting for a work which shall take its place as a landmark in the critical analysis of Lovecraft, and a standard for all future scholarship in the field.

—S. T. JOSHI

BRIEFLY NOTED

From the Dream Press (P.O. Box 864, Madison, WI 53701) has just appeared *The Illustrated Fungi from Yuggoth* (\$5.00 pb), with illustrations by Robert Kellough. The volume is not poorly printed, although the binding is a little insecure. Kellough's illustrations are occasionally effective, and generally reflect a sort of Hannes Bok or Jim Pitts style. The presentation of the text may cause some raised eyebrows: in order to accommodate some of the illustrations, some of the sonnets have been printed out of sequence; in order to conceal this disruption, the sonnets have not been numbered. In the very sentence prior to announcing this reorganisation, Mr R. Alain Everts (who apparently supervised the edition) declares: "The poems themselves have been left exactly as Lovecraft wrote them. . . ." This itself is not the case, for Everts' text seems to derive from the one I established, and which was used in the second *Necronomicon* Press edition of the series (1982). Hence, although Everts boasts of retaining Lovecraft's spelling of "shew", he is unaware that Lovecraft does not use this spelling consistently in his manuscript—it is I who have systematised such usages in Lovecraft. Moreover, in lines 9-10 of

sonnet VIII ("The Port") Everts incorporates one of my emendations of Lovecraft's manuscript (see *Collected Poems* for Lovecraft's reading). Collectors will want to obtain this edition, but scholars may just as well continue referring to the Necronomicon Press edition and wait for the emergence of David E. Schultz's forthcoming critical edition of the series.

—S.T.J.

Contributors

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STEVEN J. MARICONDA is a brilliant young scholar whose work has also appeared in *Crypt of Cthulhu* and *Etchings and Odysseys*. He is editor of two distinguished amateur journals devoted to Lovecraft, *Ultimate Chaos* and *The Twilit Grotto*.

WILL MURRAY is a versatile and prolific scholar of pulp fiction who discovered a lost Clark Ashton Smith novelette, *As It Is Written* (Donald M. Grant, 1982), and who has written widely on other authors. His articles on Lovecraft have also appeared in *Crypt of Cthulhu*.

ROBERT M. PRICE, professor of religion and philosophy at Montclair State College, is a prolific writer on religious subjects whose articles have appeared in *The Christian Century*, *The Wittenburg Door*, *Playboy*, and other journals. In pursuing his interest in Lovecraft he has begun editing the lively journal, *Crypt of Cthulhu*, along with other such neo-pulp magazines as *Risqué Stories* and *Shudder Stories*.

JOHN STRYSIK, a young film director from Illinois, entered the Lovecraftian world with a spectacular short film version of "The Music of Erich Zann", and, aside from having interpreted Franz Kafka on the screen, is now at work on a full-length film version of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.

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